

MONTANA GOV: PUT COAL PLANT AT AIR BASE

By Matt Gouras, AP Writer

HELENA, Mont. -- Gov. Brian Schweitzer told an Air Force official this week that a coal-to-liquids plant at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls is a great fit for the state.

The governor met with William Anderson, the assistant secretary for installations, environment and logistics, who is working on plans to expand the mission at Malmstrom to build a plant.

Schweitzer said it could make use of Montana's coal while making a fuel that is cleaner burning. He said the carbon dioxide generated by the process could be injected into the ground in eastern Montana oil fields to enhance oil recovery.

"You will get all the cooperation you could possibly get from any state," Schweitzer said.

The Air Force met last month with Montana's congressional delegation, which also supports the idea.

Anderson says the CTL plant could bring 1,000 permanent jobs to Great Falls, and start the Air Force on the path of using empty space on some of its bases to create a fuel that helps wean the country off foreign oil.

"We can't afford to be curtailed by governments that don't like us," Anderson said.

He said the Air Force believes it can develop a fuel within a decade that is cleaner and has a "zero footprint" on the environment.

Anderson said he got the idea about pursuing the project at Malmstrom after hearing Schweitzer, a dogged supporter of the technology, make his pitch at a conference in New York for turning coal into liquid fuel.

He said the Malmstrom plant, if built, could take up to 300 acres on the base and produce 25,000 barrels of fuel a day. Existing rail and pipe lines at the base could be utilized.

The Air Force plans to work with private investors and industry experts on the final shape of the plant before it pursues a contract to build it.

Anderson said a community meeting was planned for Great Falls on Wednesday to gauge local support for such a project.

"All we are looking for is energy security for the country," Anderson said.

Schweitzer said concerns that the plant would use too much water are overblown. The project, backed by the Air Force, could help lead industry down the path of building more coal-to-liquid plants.

"This is the start of something real big," he said.